

Several former gas station sites expected to get 'brownfield' classifications from EPA

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A \$400,000 grant from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will pay for Madison County officials to identify historically contaminated properties, the first step toward ultimate clean-up and redevelopment of the property also known as brownfields.

"Being awarded this grant from the EPA is an important development in the eventual clean-up of abandoned and dilapidated industrial and commercial properties throughout Madison County," Madison County Chairman Alan Dunstan, D-Troy, in making the grant announcement at a press conference on Wednesday, Aug. 26. "And it is also a key first step in Madison County's economic development plan to concentrate on areas where jobs are needed most."

Dunstan was joined by Congressmen John Shimkus, Rodney Davis and Mike Bost, all Republicans.

"Although the EPA awarded Madison County this grant based on need, the support our application received from Congressmen Shimkus, Davis and Bost was particularly helpful when you consider Madison County was just one of thousands of counties throughout the country competing for a limited amount of available grant dollars," Dunstan said.

"This was clearly an example of elected officials, representing different political parties, working together for the betterment of Madison County and its residents," Dunstan added. "This collective effort will result in improved public health, a better environment and, ultimately, jobs for our residents."

The brownfield assessment will primarily concentrate on the northern, eastern and southern portions of Madison County.

Shimkus stressed the redevelopment opportunities of brownfield sites that will be identified.

"I am committed to working toward the transformation of our area's abandoned and contaminated properties into environmentally safe areas for use by our citizens and for possible redevelopment," he said. "Many of the sites we believe will be classified as brownfields are strategically located and are excellent sites for redevelopment."

In recent years, EPA brownfield assessment grants were awarded to the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority and America's Central Port (formerly the Tri-City Regional Port District), to access more than 70 sites in the industrial corridor located in the western portion of the county.

Potential Brownfield sites that will be addressed as part of this study range from industrial sites as large as 80 acres to small, former gas stations. Preliminary work on the project revealed that in

a number of rural areas, businesses which at one time supported the industrial facilities in the eastern part of the county are abandoned and appear to suffer from contamination.

Smaller communities located along major transportation corridors have numerous former gas stations that have long closed and those sites remain an impediment to redevelopment. Those abandoned gas stations have likely released petroleum/BTEX into the soil and groundwater. Although much of this is undocumented, early gas stations are notorious for leaking tanks.

Frank Miles, administrator of Madison County Community Development, said the EPA grant is only for the identification of brownfield sites in Madison County and does not include site clean-up.

“After the study is completed, Madison County Community Development will develop a plan for the identified brownfield that includes clean-up and removal of any contamination,” Miles said.

The EPA specifies that half of the three-year grant be used to identify hazardous brownfield sites with heavy metals, creosote and other toxicants in the soil. The remainder of the grant funds will be used to identify brownfield sites contaminated by petroleum products.

Madison County Community Development will serve as the lead agency and will retain a qualified environmental consultant to assist in managing and performing the activities funded by the grant. The department will oversee the work of the consultant and act as a liaison between the EPA, coalition members, the public, property owners and other stakeholders involved in projects resulting from this grant.

Possible brownfield sites

Madison County officials are confident the following locations will ultimately be classified as “brownfield” sites:

- The empty gas station on 6th Street in Highland.
- Two empty gas stations outside of Marine at Illinois Route 4 and I-70.
- The former A.R. Graiff Grade School in Livingston. The school, which is no longer being used by the Staunton School District, was built in the early 1960s, prior to the EPA guidelines that are now in place. According to local and district officials, the school was built over a mine and is sinking.
- A 1930s-era gas station on Illinois Route 140 in Carpenter
- An open space with concrete pad on East Main Street in St. Jacob.
- The empty gas station, and former Innkeeper restaurant and motel in Hamel. The gas tanks from the old station are leaking. It was brought up as a potential brownfield site by the Hamel mayor.